

## **June 5<sup>th</sup> 2011: Practical Christianity #1 'Just Do It!' –James 1:22-25**

The other day I was explaining to Serena that the title for my message this morning was 'Just Do It' and her immediate response was 'Nike'.....and I believe she is far from alone in that because through the power of advertisement Nike has made that slogan its own.

However, I reckon that James, the author of the New Testament book of James, may well argue that he used it first. For in the NKJV of James 1:22 we read:- ***But be doers of the word, and not hearers only***...In other words—Just Do It.

This James was not one of the Apostles. In fact he was one of the brothers of Jesus who after initially rejecting Him came to such a strong and active faith in Christ, that he became the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. He was renown as a Prayerful man and a Practical man and he was intent on encouraging believers to be active in their following of Jesus.

This letter of James is one of the most Jewish books in the New Testament and in content it has been linked with the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. It contains a whole heap of proverbial type sayings—statements and challenges about practical Christian living, and over the next few weeks we will be considering some of these with the challenge to act upon them as 'doers of the Word'.

Before then however, we need to look more closely at the context of James' instructions to 'Just Do It' so that we can fully understand why it is vital that we go beyond hearing to doing. And that context is James 1:22-25

***<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.***

Immediately we are made aware of two possible pathways open to the believer who sits under the preaching of the word, or studies it by themselves or with friends, or just reads the Bible—for the Word here refers to all the teachings contained in the Gospels and the rest of the Scriptures.

One pathway leads to self deceit and not much else. The listener has felt that they have benefitted from what they have heard, but because they did nothing in response to it, they receive no blessing from it.

The other pathway includes both listening and doing what has been laid upon their heart and they are blessed because of this. The contrast between the two pathways is perhaps made more obvious through the CEV translation of the passage:-

***Obey God's message! Don't fool yourselves by just listening to it. <sup>23</sup>If you hear the message and don't obey it, you are like people who stare at themselves in a mirror <sup>24</sup>and forget what they look like as soon as they leave. <sup>25</sup>But you must never stop looking at the perfect law that sets you free. God will bless you in everything you do, if you listen and obey, and don't just hear and forget.***

This is particularly relevant when the message proclaimed is very practical, as much of what James says is. And the illustration he gives aptly presents this, for he talks about a man looking into a mirror.

Now without being overtly sexist here I could dare to suggest that when a man looks into a mirror it is a very practical act. He looks into it for a definite reason. It may be to make sure that he looks his best in order to impress his girlfriend, or to look just right for a job interview, but he generally looks with a purpose in mind.

But if he looks and sees that his hair is all over the place, he has grease marks on his forehead, and something brown and slimy appearing out of his nostril, but rushes off and forgets to correct those things, then the time he spent looking in the mirror has been wasted, and he alone is to blame for what happens next. The mirror definitely isn't.

The connection between that and our gathering together to hear the Word of God is easily seen. It raises a question about our intent or purpose when we come into a situation such as this to hear the Word. Have we come expecting and wanting God to challenge us in some way? Is it our purpose to hear from God? Did we pray before we came for God to tell us something—lead us into some action—challenge us to remedy a wrong in our lives—through the proclamation of His word to our heart today?

And when the Word is opened before us do we look into it intently? For that is what James suggests as the best way in v25

***But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.***

This is a deliberate listening to or reading of the Scripture. Not a sleepy listening or a casual reading but an alert and active digging into the word.

It's informative to note that the Greek word used here which has been translated as 'looks intently', is exactly the same word used in Luke 24:12 of Peter when he comes to the empty tomb. He has been told that Jesus' body is not there so he comes to check it out for himself. And v12 says:-

**Luke 24:12** Contemporary English Version (CEV)

***<sup>12</sup>But Peter ran to the tomb. And when he stooped down and looked in, he saw only the burial clothes. Then he returned, wondering what had happened.***

Now Peter is not just going to have a quick glance and go, is he? This is just so important. The body of Jesus is not there and these women are saying that He is risen! So Peter makes sure he checks everything out—that he doesn't miss even the smallest clue to what has possibly happened here. He looked intently, and that's how we should look, and how we should listen to the Word of God.

Think again about James' mirror illustration for a moment. Reflect on the times you may have glanced in the bathroom mirror with no great reason for doing so, and then noticed something out of the ordinary that gave you some concern. A spot...a mole...a possible melanoma or growth that is beginning to look rather ominous. Suddenly the image you see in the mirror changes the intensity with which you are looking. It challenges you to do something further about what you have seen, or you may ignore it in the hope that it is not a serious problem.

In the case of hearing from God through His Word, that situation can arise at any time for everyone of us. We look or listen to God's Word and it challenges us about an issue in our lives that we need to do something about. We feel uneasy. We sense God speaking, and we have to either act or ignore God's Word.

This was very much case for one young man who Luke writes about in Luke 18. He came to Jesus one day and asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus being the Word of God is the mirror this man looks into. He already believes that his life of keeping the commandments has set him up

for eternity, and he expects Jesus to reflect this good picture back to him. But Jesus doesn't. Speaking as the Word of God he reflects back to the man an image that needs something more from him. Luke 18:22 says:-

***22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."***

He had expected Jesus to respond with words that affirmed the view he had of himself. He expected to be told that his image was ok. That he was doing sufficient to inherit eternal life. He looked into this spiritual mirror expecting to see nothing wrong. But the reflection he gets back from the Word of Life is of a sinner that needs to be a 'doer' in order to show his commitment to his lord. To "Just Do It", is really the message, but sadly he walks away because it is too hard.

Has that happened to you lately? You have looked intently into God's Word, during a sermon, home group study, or just in your reading of the Bible, and God has revealed something specifically to you? Perhaps something missing in your relationship with Him that He wants you to correct. A task He wants you to do. A person He wants you to befriend; to speak to; to pray for. You have sensed God speaking to you.

My challenge for you today is that you go home and think about that in some quiet place with the Lord. Take with you a notebook and jot down what comes to mind, and then record what you have done or are doing about those things. And if you find you have nothing to write then that is a message in itself that you need to do something about.

Then finally there is just one other point we can gain from seeing the Word as a mirror and it relates to how others see us. We check ourselves out in the mirror prior to others checking us out when we meet them.

This have helped me at times in the past to avoid the dreaded 'still wearing the name badge' curse. For there has been times when I have gone into a shop after being at a place where you were obliged to wear a name badge, only to be startled by some stranger addressing me by name, simply because I have forgotten to remove my name badge. Now that has been enough to embarrass me dreadfully. So I'm really happy about those times when I have happened to see myself reflected in a mirror or a window, seen the badge and removed it, before it was noticed by others.

Of course as a Christian I want to be seen everywhere wearing the name of Christ. The embarrassment is when I am seen, through my bad behavior, as

obviously not wearing the name of Christ. Not being what Christ wants me to be in that situation.

And it is only as I look into the Word and learn what Jesus expects of me as His follower. It's only as I hear what it says and judge my behavior from the Christlikeness that I am called to practice. It's only then that I can be increasingly confident in Jesus that I am living out before others the right testimony to Jesus being alive in me.

And for that to happen we need to Be Doers of the Word and not hearers only. We need in Christ's strength to get out there and JUST DO IT.